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## The Contexts of the Christchurch terror attacks: social science perspectives

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## The Contexts of the Christchurch terror attacks: social science perspectives

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**KEYWORDS** Mosque; Muslim; Christchurch; mass shooting; terrorism; right extremism

### Introduction


The social sciences are not always effective in explaining particular events, but their study does provide insights towards better explanations and guidance for interventions. It is sad when the focus is on an event such as this, but social science understanding might better provide interpretations and help prepare for other events. Interpretation of the Christchurch shootings requires bringing together a range of social science perspectives. Various topics are pertinent. These involve the relationship between:

- the attitudes of the NZ population more generally (but especially white supremacist/hate groups etc.)
- minority groups in NZ (especially those more vulnerable to prejudice) and as mediated by
- the role of media/social media and policies/programmes of the Police and other State agencies.

The remainder of this editorial introduction will point to some of the more pertinent items in the existing literature and place the articles of this special issue in contexts. An online bibliography is also attached as supplementary material.

There seems to be a limited and scattered international literature on contemporary mass shootings in advanced industrialised states and related topics, mostly focused on the USA and indeed on US School mass shootings. Jaymi et al. (2016) review methodological issues in studying rare events such as mass shootings. Joslyn and Haider-Markel (2013) at article-length, the *American Behavioral Scientist* (2018) in a special issue, and Kellner (2008) and Schildkraut and Jaymi (2016) and Schildkraut and Muschert (2019) at book length discuss the full range involved with shooting from the shooter's background, through victim reactions and media representation through longer-term effects. Much of the

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literature is concerned with deriving lessons to mitigate the effects of gun shootings. Knowledge concerning the Christchurch shootings can be woven into the more general literature.

## Terrorist shootings

On 15th March 2019, a lone Australian national gunman who had recently been living in Dunedin stormed two Christchurch mosques, killing 50 people and wounding as many more (another died later on), after emailing a 74-page manifesto to politicians and newsrooms just before the attack, and livestreaming part of his assault on *Facebook*. In his manifesto entitled 'The Great Replacement' themes concerned 'white genocide conspiracy theories', neo-Nazi tropes and symbols and copious anti-immigrant sentiment from the Norwegian shooter Anders Behring Breivik were central, together with broader 'racialised traditions' and a nod to (US President) Donald Trump's racist exhortations. In their article for this special issue, Buckingham and Alali (2020) compare right-wing extremist views expressed in the manifesto with those of ISIS, revealing commonalities, despite very different ideologies.

Although security services surveillance had failed to generate prior information on the perpetrator, police reaction was fast and the perpetrator was quickly overpowered and arrested. A confusing period of school lockdowns and police activity followed until it became clear that the immediate danger had been contained.

The social and political reactions were swift and unifying. For some documentation of media content see Ellis and Muller (2020) in this special issue. The Prime Minister (Jacinda Ardern) immediately declared 'You are Us – Aroha Nui' and this theme was proclaimed through religious services and other ritual gatherings. Very many floral tributes were brought by many in the public and support provided to the surviving victims and families, including raising money to supplement government grants for victims' families. A gun control law which outlawed assault rifles was rapidly passed with support across the political spectrum, and further gun control legislation foreshadowed the possible establishment of a gun registry (see <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-zealand-bans-military-style-semi-automatics-and-assault-rifles>). A buy-back has spent millions of dollars taking guns out of circulation. Attempts have been made to blackout the online material and the name of the perpetrator so that the fame gained by such activities is not sought by other attention-seekers. A Royal Commission chaired by a very senior judge was appointed to investigate lapses and learn lessons. The Royal Commission of Inquiry (to present its report by mid-2020 <https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/about-the-inquiry/terms-of-reference/>):

would look into what State sector agencies knew about the individual's activities before the attack, what, if anything, they did with that information, what measures agencies could have taken to prevent the attack, and what measures agencies should take to prevent such attacks in the future.

However, the fallout meant a high degree of tension remained, with concerns, for example, over the shrinking of the range of Anzac Day (25 April) celebrations for security reasons (presumably feared revenge reprisals). Some commentators (including conservative religious spokespeople) felt that unity with the Muslim community has been overemphasised, especially as Muslim traditions had been brought into some public ceremonies. The

response of the NZ Muslim community was very gracious in the face of their considerable misery.

Unfortunately, copies of the live-stream went viral despite attempts to shut diffusion down, which took longer than many would have preferred. A considerable number (some 35) of New Zealanders were identified and prosecuted for sending on the recording ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christchurch\\_mosque\\_shootings#Arrests\\_and\\_prosecutions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christchurch_mosque_shootings#Arrests_and_prosecutions)). The international concern with terrorism was heightened, particularly by the internet diffusion and led to the 'Christchurch Call' co-sponsored by French President Emmanuel Macron and Jacinda Arden after they met in Paris in May 2019 to foster cooperation amongst governments, ICT companies and other stakeholders to reduce the extent to which terrorist activity takes place and is publicised through the internet: see <https://www.christchurchcall.com>. The main outcome of the call has been a pledge signed by eight major internet providers and 48 countries to monitor extremism on the internet. Diplomatic work on developing effective programmes to suppress extremist content and develop better responses has continued since.

The massacre was embedded in a world-wide nexus of activities involving Muslim communities and the development of white supremacist ideology and terrorist activities. Practices and ideologies already well-developed were drawn on. In turn, subsequent terrorist events have been symbolically connected: a link was made to a massacre of Christians in Sri Lanka (said to be carried out in part as revenge) and to shootings targeting the Muslim community in the US (Dearden 2019). Undoubtedly the Christchurch shootings have quickly found (as the shooter intended) their place in the Hall of Alt-Right Terrorism Infamy. They also show the importance of the internet in providing a platform for the incubation and promulgation of white supremacist and other extremist ideologies.

While many implications were national, some were local. For example, a local issue which arose concerned the provincial rugby team the Canterbury *Crusaders* whose match rituals included a posse of horsemen dressed as knights performing to entertain the crowd around the game itself. For some this was seen as sensitive since it recalled the centuries old conflict between Christians and Muslims in Palestine, and so renaming of the team and elimination of the horse displays was considered. A late April 1 *NEWS* Colmar Brunton national poll found that 76% were against a name change for the Crusaders (*NZ Herald* 2019) and, although a name change has not happened, the horsemen display has been discontinued. People living regionally in Otago and Southland, National Party supporters and those aged between 18 and 29 were more likely to believe the Crusaders should keep the name, which suggests views were conservative and perhaps for the younger age-group inattentive.

As at the time of writing, the first year anniversary of the shootings is upon us, many reviews are being published. The *Guardian* tracked down several survivors (Graham-McLay 2020) and Jacinda Ardern's photo is to be on the front page of *Time*. The NZ Government has updated its counter-terrorism Strategy (strangely pre-empting the forthcoming report of the Royal Commission: <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/national-security-and-intelligence/national-security/counter-terrorism/new-zealands>).

New Zealand has long had a reputation for ethnic and religious tolerance (only partly deserved given the historical record of violence against minorities), and certainly there had been negligible collective violence and demonstrable antagonism against minority communities. Moreover, there has been considerable support for ongoing immigration and

accommodation of refugees. However, the record is far from untroubled, and an undercurrent of antagonism has bubbled away. Immigration has often been raised into an election issue, particularly by the *New Zealand First Party*. Amongst less visible events, the 'Dawn Raids' tracking down Pacifica overstayers marred the 1970s (Anae 2012). Indeed, part of the immediate background of the shootings was a proposed visit of 'white supremacist' Canadian speakers in 2018, and public discussion of other free speech issues (e.g. Listener 2019). The extreme violence, though, was a major national shock, and for many New Zealanders seemed to be a 'loss of innocence'. New Zealand was no longer inoculated by distance, size and social climate from the world realities of religious and ideological extremism and terrorism.

## Reactions/perceptions about the shootings

The media has produced much material on the events of March 15th. This was complemented by material published on online platforms, such as *The Conversation* and *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christchurch\\_mosque\\_shootings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christchurch_mosque_shootings)). Tensions between newsworthiness and social responsibility were considerable in the immediate aftermath of the shootings. In their article for this special issue, Ellis and Muller (2020) compare the decisions made by editors in New Zealand and Australia about how to report the unfolding events and aftermath: see especially the media extracts presented in the Supplementary material for Ellis and Muller. Rupar (2020) complements this by focusing on the role of journalists as first responders and the responsibilities this entails.

In addition, several journal special issues have been published since the shootings:

- *New Zealand Journal of Psychology* 48 (1). April 2019
- *Waikato Islamic Studies Review* <https://www.waikato.ac.nz/fass/UWISG/Waikato-Islamic-Studies-Review-Vol-5-No-1.pdf>.
- *Pacific Journalism Review*. <https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/pacific-journalism-review/>.

Polls have been important in probing and revealing NZ public opinion about the shooting and its aftermath. A few days after the shootings Research New Zealand (2019) surveyed 1344 New Zealanders. Their study reprised other survey data on attitudes to diversity in NZ and the extent of discrimination and on core values of NZers in relation to diversity and then asked questions directly related to the shooting and how its aftermath should be handled. Just over one-half of respondents (57%) felt 'New Zealand will change as a result of the shootings' - more of these respondents feeling it would be 'for the better' (33%) than 'for the worse' (8%), although a majority (57%) felt it would change a little 'in both directions'. Views on some of the changes expected as a result of the shootings included:

- 73% agreed that government resourcing should increase so that '(white supremacist) individuals and groups are more actively monitored';
- 79% agreed that 'Facebook and other social media platforms should be required to exercise greater control over what people are able to post on their social media platform';
- 85% disagreed that it should be legally possible to obtain a military style, semi-automatic rifle; and

- 73% respondents felt ‘personally safe’ despite the shootings, while 25% felt unsafe or were unsure about their personal safety.

A *1 News Colmar Brunton* phone poll ( $n = 1000$ ) published mid-April 2019 found that 61% of respondents thought the gun control changes made were ‘about right’ while a further 19% believed the amended law didn’t go far enough. An IPSOS ‘NZ Issues Monitor’ survey ( $n = 614$ , carried out in March 2019) found increasing concern with ‘racism & race relations’ and ‘defence, foreign affairs and terrorism’, although these levels may fall over the long-term.

The Victoria University of Wellington Institute for Governance and Policy Studies (IGPS) carried out a repeat survey of their annual Colmar-Brunton trust survey ( $n = 1000$ ) about a month after the shootings and a round of previous interviewing for this survey, to see what effect the shooting had had on New Zealanders (Chapple and Prickett 2019). They found no change in personal trust.

On our measurement scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is no trust at all and 10 is totally trust, our survey showed that interpersonal trust averaged a value of 6.3, both before and after the shootings. New Zealanders’ trust basically didn’t change in response to the shootings. If the goal of the shootings was to lower trust and sow suspicion across wider New Zealand, there is no evidence that it has succeeded in its goal. On the other hand, the survey results don’t provide evidence for any national ‘coming together’ in the sense of an upsurge in trust following the shootings, as was the case for some trust measures in the United States and in Norway following mass terrorist events there.

The survey also asked respondents how much trust they had in specific people or groups living in New Zealand, with the most trusted religious group Buddhists, and the least trusted Evangelicals, while trust levels towards all other religious groups were effectively indistinguishable and without a meaningful trust deficit towards Muslims (or Jews). Greaves et al. (2020) in this special issue analyse ISSP data to reveal further religion-related attitudes.

It seems the NZ public was fairly tolerant of minorities and non-Christian religious groups, at least when answering surveys, and have not changed their attitudes since.

## Public and white supremacist ideology in NZ

There has been quite an array of studies of New Zealanders’ attitudes to migrants, refugees and others. A particular concern is to identify more systematically developed ideologies (e.g. white supremacy) behind the clusters of attitudes. One of the difficulties of such studies is that they are often too general, so that different ethnicities (for example) aren’t always separately included when questions are formulated. Studies of attitudes to migrants have been tracked through a variety of survey operations, some extending over many years, including:

- *NZ Asia Foundation* (wide ranging annual survey: note their recent work on Maori attitudes to Asia, and several academic studies using this data. <https://www.asianz.org.nz/>);
- MBIE’s two-yearly *Community Perceptions survey* <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/assets/c3c87370d1/community-perceptions-migrants-immigration-2015.pdf>;



- IPSOS's series on New Zealanders' attitudes to refugees and immigration (the 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2018 <http://www.curia.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Ipsos-New-Zealand-Immigration-Refugees-and-Brexit-Survey-Report-2016.pdf>);
- *The International Social Survey Programme's* (ISSP) occasional 'national identity' module (e.g. 2013);
- *The NZ Attitudes and Values Study* (see articles in the *NZ Journal of Psychology* special issue);
- *NZ Values Survey* (especially. attitudes to potential neighbours with different characteristics – this is the NZ version of the World Values Survey);
- *New Settlers Study* Programme, Massey University;
- UMR's standalone study on attitudes to immigrants (see Hall 2017);
- Statistics NZ's *General Social Survey* (items on neighbouring preferences and attitudes to multiculturalism etc.);
- Quality of Life project sponsored by New Zealand's larger cities (views on effect of cultural diversity and neighbour preferences: <http://www.qualityoflifeproject.govt.nz/>).

The situation of immigrants also arises on occasions in studies of nationality and citizenship (e.g. International Social Survey Programme 2013, 2014 and UMR 2009) with respondents sometimes also asked their views on how immigrants are/should be fitting into NZ society.

These sources are too myriad to be readily summarised here. Attitudes to religious groupings are more rare: a sophisticated study by Shaver et al. (2016) pinpoints findings, and the study by Greaves et al. (2020) provided in this special issue from the 2018 ISSP module on religion reports not only very recent data but also is quite detailed in its focus, reporting on specific questions on attitudes to Muslims. The IGPS study has been summarised above.

Although the gunman was alone and indeed further supporters have not since been identified, he was clearly embedded within a wider network (or e-network) of hate-groups, white supremacist, alt-right ideologies which are held together by a range of hate-groups and in particular through the web. The perpetrator's place in this fringe culture may represent a changed stance with such bloggers operating distanced from their more visible face and symbolism although his more civilised veneer was stripped away when proclaiming his beliefs. The Far Right have been studied in NZ for over 40 years, particularly by Paul Spoonley (e.g. 1987). More recently sociologists Gilbert and Elley (2020) have investigated such groups and their most recent report is included in this special issue. This special issue also includes Buckingham and Alali's (2020) examination of the discourses in the shooter's manifesto as well as that of Isis, identifying areas of commonality.

## **The aggravators: social media, gun ownership**

The dark side of social media has also been a major facilitating factor for xenophobia, particularly its recent capacity for live streaming. Social media can involve a wider input of public views but it can also be a source of venom, which has been mapped out in several NZ internet studies especially Netsafe and IPSoS surveys during 2018. An emerging commentary on social media includes a review by the Helen Clark Foundation (2019)



which seeks to add further Principles to the Christchurch Call. The importance of social media is underlined by several contributions to this special issue.

Netsafe have carried out surveys of online hate speech in 2018 ( $n = 1001$ ) and 2010 ( $n = 1161$ , both in June: see Netsafe 2019 and Pacheco and Melhuish 2018, 2019). The 2018 report has useful bibliographical items. 15% of New Zealand adults reported being personally targeted with online hate speech in the last 12 months. This is 4% points higher than the previous year (and after the attacks) but this wasn't statistically significant. Half the Muslim respondents said they were personally targeted with online hate in the last 12 months, and Hindus were also heavily hit, together with people with disabilities and those identifying as non-heterosexuals. Further, about 3 in 10 say they have seen or encountered online hate speech content targeting someone else. Nearly 7 in 10 New Zealand adults think that online hate speech is spreading. More general attitudes were also tapped: over 8 in 10 believe that social media platforms should do more to stop online hate speech, three-quarters would support new legislation to stop online hate, but a similar proportion considers that more than legislation is needed to prevent its spread, while 8 in 10, believe that everyone has a role to play in addressing hateful speech. Further, more than half disagreed with the idea that people should be entitled to say whatever they want online, while a quarter had no opinion. A comparative study (Netsafe 2019) showed similar patterns with Australian respondents.

The rather lax firearms laws in NZ seemingly required a crisis such as this to break-through political blockages. There has been little systematic data on firearms ownership in NZ. Owners are registered but not their guns. Police data (see their information sheet: <https://www.police.govt.nz/about-us/publication/firearms-official-information-act-proactive-public-releases-june-2018>) suggest that there are some 250,000 licensed gun holders in NZ. Thorp (1997) seems to be the last systematic data on ownership, until the IGPS survey (Chapple and Prickett 2019) reported recent figures. Thorp's report (p. 38) conveys that a survey conducted by AGB McNair found that 20% of New Zealand's 1.17million households had at least one firearm (on average 1.8 users of the firearms in each household. That translated into approximately 350,000 to 400,000 users of firearms.

The IGPS study found that 15% of New Zealanders had guns in their homes: evenly split between those who personally own a gun (7.7%) or live in a household with someone who owned a gun (7.5%). Overall, gun owners were more trusting of other gun owners, as well as the pro-gun lobby, than non-gun owners, however, they also trust themselves far more than they trust the pro-gun lobby who claim to represent them. Gun owners report:

- moderately lower levels of education,
- they are somewhat more likely to own their home,
- they are more likely to be New Zealand European,
- they are more likely to be New Zealand born,
- being less likely to live in Auckland or Wellington, but more likely to live places outside those cities in the North Island, and
- being less likely to identify as being at the left of the political spectrum but more likely to consider themselves Centre-right.

In addition, it is important to understand why users own guns and features of the NZ 'gun culture', and also what the aggregate consequences of gun ownership are. Studies show that guns are used particularly in hunting and on farms. A series of other studies (see supplementary bibliography) look at mainly health-related or offence-related records of firearm harm, such as suicides or crime expedited by guns.

Australia's experience with gun laws after the traumatic Port Arthur shootings is pertinent (see Alpers and Ghazarian 2019).

## **Vulnerable religious communities in NZ**

NZ's general spirit of tolerance (see above) doesn't hold out for all groups. The members of some minorities merge into the mainstream, while others are visible and more readily the target for discrimination and prejudice. The particularly vulnerable communities are very complex and not particularly large in number. They are distinguished by several notably different markers from the host population: skin tone, apparel (e.g. wearing Burqas or Turbans), and cultural differences in practises (e.g. food). Broadly they centre on Muslim/Islamic (and related especially e.g. Hindu, Sikh, Jain) religions, and include peoples speaking Arabic and whose ancestry originated in the Middle East (including North Africa but also part of Southeast Asia and East Asia which are recently beginning to be represented in New Zealand.) Many are refugees. The mix of nationality/country of birth, ethnicity, race, religion and language is complex and the range is extensive: e.g. there are immigrants living in New Zealand from over 50 Muslim-majority countries.

The grouping is certainly wider than the group of migrants to NZ that are often described as 'New settlers' or Asian. In NZ migration studies three waves of migration are usually referred to: British, Pacific and Asian, and this grouping fits awkwardly into the latter and is almost in itself a fresh wave. The grouping somewhat awkwardly straddles the Statistics NZ ethnic classification which combines the wide sweep of 'Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African' (MELAA): much of this grouping is relevant – North Africa and Middle East, East Asia). As is commonly acknowledged, New Zealanders tend to regard 'Asians' as those with origins in East or South East Asia, whereas South Asians are more likely to be termed Indians, Pakistani or Bangladeshi. (Central Asia is largely excluded: see Rasanathan et al. 2006).

Since their numbers are relatively small, Muslims tend to 'fly under the radar' statistically with few surveys having enough Muslim respondents to be separately estimated. The Muslim community with some 46,000 people in the 2013 census now represents a significant section of New Zealand's population (increasing 27.9% since 2006 from c36,000 and projected to constitute some c55,000 at present. Of these about a quarter were born in New Zealand, just over 20% in the Pacific Islands (Fiji) and a quarter each in Asia or the Middle East and Africa. The demography of some of this grouping as revealed in the 2013 census is laid bare by Foroutan (2017): see also Pio 2014. Other pertinent points are numbers for Sikhs c20,000; Hindus c90,000. For census data on the relationship between ethnicity and religion see Pio 2014, p. 18.) Special runs of Census 2013 data are deployed by Pio (2014) covering Hindus, Indian Chinese, Muslims, Sikhs and Zoroastrians across many aspects of labour force-related characteristics.

The footprint of identifying as Muslim can be seen across several census variables: whether the person was born in a Muslim-majority country, their declared ethnicity

(possibly a component of a multiple ethnicity), a language or a religion. Given that for many these are inter-twined which is the best way to identify people? 2018 census results (See [Table 1](#) and for more detail the online supplementary table) show further growth of the relevant populations compared to Pio’s statistics above. The aggregate of the various religions is the characteristic with the largest numbers, and is likely to be the one best used in social research.

Note that deficiencies in the data-collection of the 2018 census may inculcate considerable error.

The bare demographic bones are fleshed out by a variety of studies (especially. those of a Dunedin grouping of scholars – Erich Kolig, Stephanie Dobson, and Jacqueline Leckie: for reference to some of their work see supplementary bibliography). Other related ethno-religious groups have also been studied. Broader research programmes include:

- Refugees Voices; <https://arcc.org.nz/strengthening-refugee-voices-project/>
- The Longitudinal Immigration Survey (LIS); [http://archive.stats.govt.nz/browse\\_for\\_stats/population/Migration/lisnz.aspx](http://archive.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/population/Migration/lisnz.aspx) and
- Massey University’s ‘New Settlers’ and ‘Integration of Immigrants’ Programmes. <http://integrationofimmigrants.massey.ac.nz/>

There is a limited range of institutionalised scholarly attention in New Zealand to Muslim and similar minorities. The University of Auckland had an Islamic Research Centre but it closed in 2017, while AUT sponsors a Centre for Asian & Ethnic Minority Health Research. A Waikato group has been active, sponsoring several issues of what they describe as a graduate journal - *Waikato Islamic Studies Review*. VUW has a very active Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research (CACR) and at University of Otago there is an Asian-NZ Research Cluster. More broadly there is also a *New Zealand Asian Studies Journal* and there is an Asian Media Centre. Research interest in the broader immigration/refugee field is wider, anchored in considerable part by an ongoing research interest from the NZ Immigration Service, and in particular there are several surveys pertaining to the public’s attitudes. In 2014 Jay Marlowe and Sue Elliott guest edited an issue of *Kotuitui* on ‘Refugee resettlement and seeking asylum in Aotearoa New Zealand’. For an overview of broader literature see Syed and Pio (2018). Several health research groups have carried out studies of the health needs of vulnerable communities in NZ. (For a summative account see Kanengoni et al. 2018.)

There has been some development of relevant institutions and groupings concerned with policy and similar issues, including services offered to such communities – relevant Institutions include:

**Table 1.** Muslim-related data: 2018 Census.

Census variable	Categories	Number in census
Country of Birth	Muslim-majority countries	65,469
Ethnicity	selected Muslim-majority countries plus ‘Arab’	39,732
Language	Arab, Assyrian	15,084
Religion	Islam, Hindu, Jainism, Sikh, etc.	186,906

Source: 2018 Census totals by topic – national highlights.

- Office of Ethnic Communities, DIA <http://ethniccommunities.govt.nz/> see esp. community directory <http://ethniccommunities.govt.nz/community-directory>;
- Multicultural NZ <https://multiculturalnz.org.nz/> (also regional councils)
- Refugee Council <http://rc.org.nz/>.

Also, it is useful to note that there is some co-operation, especially at a local level, amongst religious congregations across the 'Abrahamite' religious grouping (Judaism, Christianity and Muslim which has some overlapping doctrines and centres for worship), as it provides further context on the place of Muslim communities in NZ.

These government and community services themselves have been seldom studied, although they have also sponsored relevant research – e.g. Lawrence and Kearns 2005; McIntosh and Cockburn-Wooten 2018; and Shrestha-Ranjit et al. 2017). The NZ Muslim community has long voiced concerns about difficulties in interacting with authorities, with the Human Rights Foundation documenting some of these in its report (2019). The community has also carried out its own studies – especially into experiences of discrimination. In this special issue Rahman (2020) examines some of the effects of the shootings on Muslim identity, particularly as portrayed on social media.

## Regulation

New Zealand's Security apparatus attempts to control extremism, but has received considerable criticism for its apparent failure to also surveil right-wing extremism. There is a limited literature on this apparatus and how it operates, but in this special issue Battersby (2020) is able to deploy data from his study of security personnel carried out before the Christchurch shootings. In addition, several agencies (e.g. Department of Internal Affairs, Race Relations Commissioner) attempt more visibly to control hate speech and to tamper-down extremism in social media and media.

## Conclusions

As a contribution towards mobilising relevant NZ-related social science material to help understand the Christchurch Massacre, this special issue provides an editorial overview of many of the issues raised by this sad event, together with a bibliography of related literature, including post-massacre social science contributions. The seven contributions to the special issue add much more. They draw on various discourses (including social media), content analyses, ethnography, interviews, and survey data. They examine right-wing extremists, key media personnel and their strategies, security agency personnel and their strategies, the identities of Muslims in NZ and the attitudes of the NZ public more generally. Disciplinary approaches include communication studies, social psychology, sociology and security studies. All of these are somewhat 'opportunistic' in obtaining the data they use, as no major comprehensive study has yet been launched, although the Royal Commission may provide some useful material. Ours is but an introduction, and undoubtedly many more studies will be built on its foundations.

## Dedication

Bringing attention to bear on relevant research seems rather distant from the pain and more widely experienced discomfort brought about by the shooting, but as academic researchers it is our job to research and so this is our contribution to understanding and hopefully acting upon these despicable deeds. It is important for Muslim voices to be heard (see Rahman 2020 in this special issue), although at short notice this has proven difficult to arrange to an adequate level. It is surely also important to support such voices.

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